

5 *NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT ANALYSIS*

A. INTRODUCTION

This section details the analysis of current development patterns and growth trends in specific areas in the Town of Blacksburg. Blacksburg has been segmented into seven neighborhood development districts, as defined by the Town of Blacksburg Department of Planning and Engineering and the citizens of Blacksburg, in order to enhance our understanding of how each area has developed throughout its history, and in particular, over the past ten years (Map 5-1).

B. METHODOLOGY

RKG Associates obtained a Geographic Information System parcel boundary map layer and property assessment database from the Blacksburg Department of Planning and Engineering and the Montgomery County Tax Assessors Office. The parcel-level data for each District was parsed out of the Town's property assessment database for analysis and comparison. Neighborhood parcels were

Map 5-1

Town of Blacksburg Neighborhood Development



separated by District boundary using a geographic information system, or GIS, software package that spatially links parcel attribute data, such as acreage, land use, assessed value and sales information, to a computer generated map depicting the parcel boundaries. As a result, this process produced a fairly accurate inventory of all Town parcels by their respective Districts.

From these inventories, the consultants were able to categorize the different parcels by land use, as designated by the Town of Blacksburg Department of Planning and Engineering. Where land use designations were not available, the consultants conducted a “windshield” survey and noted the current land use of these properties. The properties were then separated into 21 separate land use categories as shown in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1

Town of Blacksburg

Tax Base Analysis Major Land Use Categories

EMPLOYMENT- GENERATING	RESIDENTIAL	OPEN SPACE	PUBLIC
Mixed Use –Res.	Residential (LD)	Agricultural	Civic
Mixed Use –Com.	Residential (Rural)	Vacant	University
Commercial	Duplex	Unknown	Parks and Trails
Office	Condo		Right of Ways
Medical	Townhouse		
R&D	Mobile Home		
Industrial	Multi-Unit Complex		

In order to conduct the development trend analysis, the residential and employment-generating parcels were then further separated by the “Year Structure Built” field in order to determine the pace and level of development in each District by land use type.

As stated in Chapter 4, the University District was removed from the analysis. Since Virginia Tech owns all of the land in this District, current and future land development patterns are largely outside the influence of the Town. However, university-owned or leased parcels located within the other six Districts have been included in District-level and Town-wide analyses.

It must also be reiterated that the parcel databases provided by the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County have some limitations in accuracy and

completeness. In situations where a property had an incomplete record, the missing data value had to be calculated by RKG Associates based on the average of similar properties. As a result, the analysis presented in this chapter is not intended to be an exact representation of land use conditions in the field. Instead, the data is used solely for the purposes of identifying general land use trends and growth patterns within each of the Town's neighborhood districts.

C. PROFILE OF BLACKSBURG NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICTS

Each of Blacksburg's neighborhood districts has unique land use and development characteristics. This portion of Chapter 5 details each district's current land use characteristics as they presently exist. It is necessary to understand these differences before analyzing development trends and making growth recommendations. The districts described in this chapter include:

- Downtown District
- Southwest District
- South End District
- Northwest District
- Midtown District
- North End District

The data presented in this Chapter are brief overviews of the actual data collected for each of these neighborhood districts in this analysis. The detailed analysis for each one of these neighborhoods has been included in the Appendix section.

1. Downtown District

- **District Description** – The Downtown District of Blacksburg is located at the geographic center of Town (Map 5-2). The District encompasses the original "16 squares" designated at the founding of the Town in the 18th Century.¹ Virginia Tech borders Downtown to the west and Midtown to the north, east and south. The District is centered along North Main Street, with the roadway acting as a "spine". Downtown is relatively small, comprising approximately 82 acres of land (0.8% of the Town). As a result, the average parcel size in Downtown (0.31 acres per parcel) is over four times smaller than the Town-wide average (1.26 acres per parcel).

¹ From the 1996 Town of Blacksburg Comprehensive Plan

➤ **District Overview**

- Downtown accounts for less than 1.0% of the total acreage in Blacksburg, but accounts for 4.9% of the total assessed value.
- Properties classified as exempt account for almost 28% of the District's total assessed value.
- There are only 4.1 acres of land on vacant parcels in Downtown, indicating this District has very limited potential for new development.
- The average land values (\$367,600/acre) for employment-generating parcels are over 3 times greater than the next highest District (Midtown) and nearly 4.5 times greater than the town average for commercially developed areas.
- In contrast, average employment-generating building value per square foot (\$35.87/SF) is lower than the average for the Town (\$43.01/SF).
- In 1999, there was approximately ½ million square feet of non-residential space, with 55.5% dedicated to commercial uses.
- Employment-generating parcels in Downtown have an average FAR of 0.48, which is 2.8 times denser than average commercial development densities in Blacksburg.
- Residential land uses in Downtown account for less than 2% of total residential parcels in Blacksburg and 1.6% of residential assessed values.
- Assessed residential land values are the highest in Downtown (\$181,529/acre), nearly 4 times the Town average of \$46,669/acre.
- The value of the vacant or agriculturally-zoned land located in Downtown (4.1 acres) is nearly 24 times greater (\$254,782/acre) than the Town average (\$10,768/acre) for similar land.

2. Southwest District

➤ **District Description** – The Southwest District is located on the western edge of Blacksburg, bordered by Northwest to the north, Virginia Tech to the east, South End to the south and Montgomery County to the west (Map 5-3). The Route 460 Bypass runs along the eastern edge of the District, and gives motorists direct access from the Bypass into the Southwest District at the Prices Fork Road interchange. Prices Fork Road runs East-West through the District and is the main collector road for people traveling to the Virginia Tech campus or onto the Bypass. The District is primarily rural in nature, but has a collection of high-density housing and a small cluster of retail and office space along Prices Fork Road.

➤ **Overview**

- This District comprises 13.0% of the total assessed value and 19.0% of total land area in Blacksburg.
- Almost 800 of the 1,906 acres (41.6%) in Southwest are classified as university use. Most of this land is undeveloped and currently used for open space and agricultural purposes.
- There is less than 100,000 SF of employment-generating building space, which is the lowest total for any District.
- Over 85% of employment-generating building square feet are classified as commercial.
- The three professional office parcels have a value of \$102.73/SF, which is significantly higher than other office projects in Blacksburg.
- There are approximately 147 acres of vacant land and roughly 523 acres of agricultural land in this district.
- Although there are significantly more single-family residential properties (298), multi-family properties comprise a greater share of the District's total unit count (87.0%) and total assessed value (59.4%).

3. Midtown District

➤ **District Description** – Midtown is located along the eastern edge of Blacksburg, bordered by North End to the north, South End to the south and Downtown and

Virginia Tech to the west. Montgomery County abuts the District to the east. Due to the presence of Virginia Tech, Downtown residents were forced to develop eastward as demand for non-academic expansion in Blacksburg increased. As a result, Midtown was the natural location for development after Downtown became significantly built-out. This District now contains the majority of commercial, residential and civic uses (excluding the university) in Blacksburg. Although the District has a high concentration of residential and commercial properties, there still are a number of sizable lots available for development (Map 5-4).

➤ **Overview**

- The District comprises 47.4% of the Town's total assessed value while only accounting for 22.0% of its total acreage.
- Residential properties account for 78.9% of the District assessed value, with single-family houses making up 72.7% of residential acreage and 56.4% of residential assessed value.
- Despite the high residential presence in the District, Midtown also contains a significant share (27.0%) of the Town's employment-generating tax base (1,087,422 SF on 153 acres).
- Midtown tops all Districts in the number of employment-generating properties (148 parcels), accounting for roughly 35% of the Town's 424 parcels.
- Commercial is the dominant employment-generating use in Midtown, equaling 63.5% of the District's parcels, 80.7% of its assessed value, and 80.8% of its total building square feet.
- There are a significant number of parcels that are classified as parking lots (37), covering just under 30 acres.
- Midtown has over 220 acres of vacant parcels, mainly in the eastern and southern section of the District.

4. North End District

- **District Description** – The North End District is the gateway into Blacksburg from the North along the 460-Bypass. The District is situated in the northeast corner of Town, surrounded by Northwest to the west, Midtown to the south and Montgomery County to the east and north. The District goes as far west as Tom's Creek Road and is bounded by Patrick Henry Drive to the south. The Route 460 Bypass bisects North End, but only allows one access point into the District at the intersection of North Main Street, near the Town limits. North End is primarily a residential area, with limited commercial and office development along Patrick Henry Drive and North Main Street (Map 5-5).

➤ **Overview**

- The North End comprises 16.5% of the Town's total assessed value, while comprising 18.2% of the total acreage.

- The District is primarily a residential area, with residential uses accounting for 86.9% of the District's total assessed value but only 24.8% of the total acreage.
- Single-family housing is the primary residential use, accounting for 55.9% of total residential assessed value and 64.3% of all District parcels. However, single-family uses only account for 31.7% of the total residential units.
- Almost 700 acres in North End are dedicated to agricultural uses and almost 200 acres are classified as vacant, indicating a potential for continued residential development with limited neighborhood commercial.
- The District has approximately 209,000 SF of employment-generating space, which is the second lowest total in Blacksburg (Southwest).

5. South End District

➤ **District Description** – The South End District encompasses the southern portion of the Route 460 Bypass. Southwest, Virginia Tech and Midtown border the District to the north while Montgomery County borders the remaining sides. The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (CRC) is located in South End. The District is the industrial center of Blacksburg, containing all industrial uses in Town. This is primarily due to the convenient interstate highway access, the proximity to the CRC, and the low level of residential presence in the District (Map 5-6).

➤ **Overview**

- The District constitutes a small percentage of both acreage (9.7%) and total assessed value (10.9%). The property values for the developed portions of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center are significant, but are currently exempt from taxes.
- The primary gateway into Blacksburg (the intersection of 460-Bypass and South Main Street) is located in this District.
- South End contains very little residential development (297 units) as a percentage of the total District assessed value (14.8%) and acreage (13.5%).
- The South End District contains all of the Town's industrial uses, with these uses comprising 65.7% of the District's employment-generating square footage and, 67.2% of the total acreage and 57.5% of the total assessed value.
- The South End District still contains 272.8 vacant acres in 61 parcels, with approximately one-third of that total associated with the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center.
- Current zoning indicates that most of the vacant parcels are zoned industrial or office.

6. Northwest District

➤ **District Description** –The Northwest District is located in the northwest portion of Blacksburg, surrounded by North End and Midtown to the east, Southwest to the south and Montgomery County to the west and north. The area of

Northwest close to Midtown contains the more moderate-density residential and employment-generating uses.

➤ **Overview**

- Northwest comprises 7.3% of the total assessed value in Blacksburg, but over 30% of the total acreage.
- Northwest is primarily a rural residential and agricultural area, with a significant number of single-family residential parcels close to Route 460 and Price's Fork Road.
- Employment-generating properties constitute a very small portion of District in terms of land area, comprising only 0.7% of total acreage. However, employment-generating development accounts for 9.1% of the total assessed value. Nearly all of this commercial development is located along University City Boulevard.
- There currently is 229,180 square feet of commercial building space within the district, comprising less than 6% of the Town total.

There is a significant amount of undeveloped and underdeveloped land (1,753 acres total), including 117 acres of vacant land, 951 acres of agricultural land and 685 acres of low-density residential land.

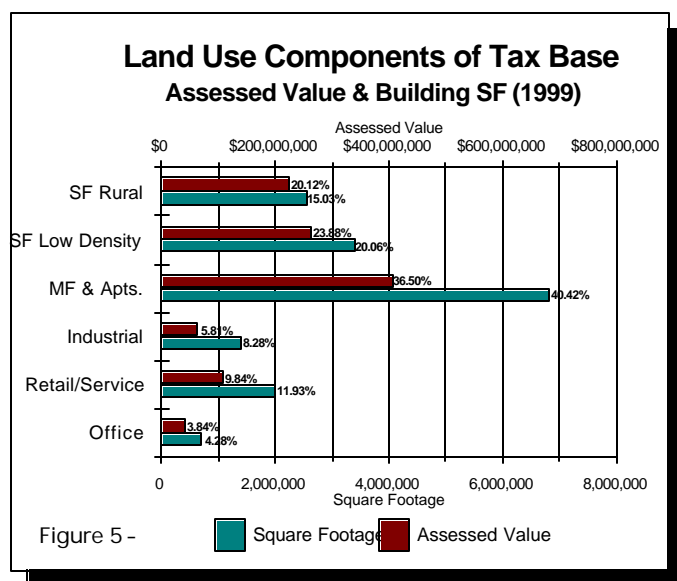
- Eight of the 13 employment-generating parcels are classified as parking lots, leaving only 5 parcels in Northwest as developed, employment-generating properties.
- Future development in the Northwest District must be sensitive to the topographic and environmental constraints present in this area.

D. NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT TRENDS (1990-1999)

This section discusses the development growth patterns of each District between 1990 and 1999 to contrast the current development inventory discussed in the previous section. The tabular development trends data for each neighborhood district is displayed at the end of this chapter. Figure 5-1 indicates that multi-family units account for the largest share of the Town's tax base and building space, followed by single family dwellings. As this section will show, residential uses have experienced more significant growth in Blacksburg than commercial and industrial uses, especially in the districts on the north and west of the Route 460-Bypass.

1. Downtown District

Downtown experienced significant new residential development over the past 10 years. Over 140 units, totaling 11.51 acres, were developed in the District. While this total is low compared to the Town housing base, these properties constitute an increase of almost 250% in multi-family housing units and a 140% increase in the total housing stock in the Downtown District. Two properties were developed as commercial uses, adding 11,203 SF to the District's employment-generating



building stock. These properties have less than half the density (0.20 FAR) than the other existing commercial properties (0.42 FAR). Despite the strong residential growth, future development in Downtown will most likely be rehabilitation of aging properties or demolition and redevelopment of under-performing properties.

2. Southwest District

The Southwest District also experienced very limited growth during the 1990s considering the large supply of vacant and agricultural land. Two new employment-generating and nine new residential properties were built between 1990 and 1999. These 11 developments only consumed 9.2 acres, or less than 5% of the total vacant land, in 1990 and only added 6.2% new taxable building space in Southwest. Of the two new employment-generating properties, one has a commercial use and the other is an office building. Both parcels account for only 1.64 acres and add 7,500 SF of new building space. On the residential side, most of the development is multi-family housing. There were 84 new housing units constructed during the 1990s, constituting a 5.7% increase in the total multi-family unit count and a 6.8% increase in assessed value. The average size of the new single-family homes (3,399 SF) is significantly larger than the existing average of 1,888 SF per house in the District. The assessed land and building values are higher for these new homes as well.

3. Midtown District

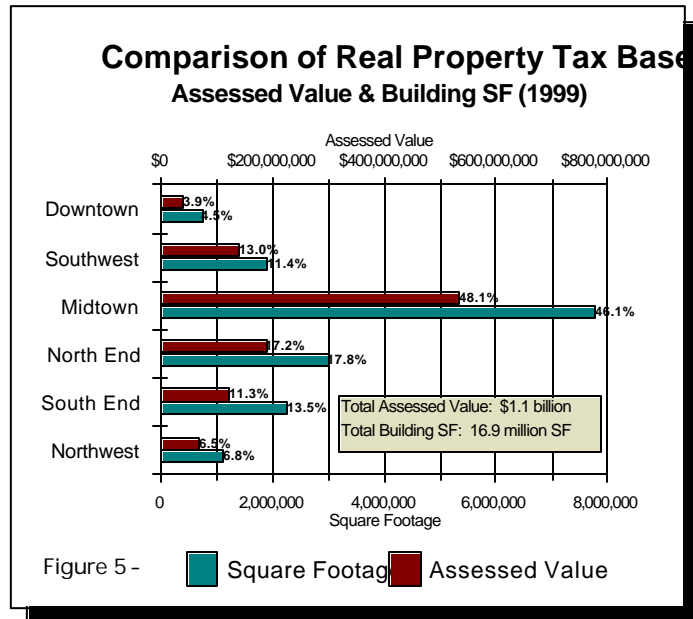
Midtown experienced steady growth during the 1990s in residential and employment-generating uses. A total of 116 residential properties were developed during this time period, totaling 517 new housing units. A majority (81.2%) of these residential units is multi-family housing. Although these developments constitute a small percentage of the District's residential totals (approximately 9.3% of the total), the growth indicates there is still a market push to develop in Midtown despite the higher land costs and relatively less available vacant land. Interestingly, the building assessed values of the new single-family residential units are \$20 to \$40 higher per square foot than the existing space while the new multi-family housing space has typically been below the existing values (except condominiums).

Conversely, the fewer employment-generating properties developed in the 1990s (12 parcels) constituted a much more significant increase in the district totals. These new developments accounted for a 10.6% increase in employment-

generating parcels, a 19.5% increase in total employment-generating square footage, a 20.0% increase in acres developed and a 26.8% increase in total assessed value. In addition, the assessed per square foot value of the new buildings (\$72.96/SF) is more than twice the value of existing commercial space (\$31.92/SF) in the district.

4. North End District

The North End District has maintained its residential focus and experienced significant growth through the 1990s. Almost all of the new development in the North End (365 of 369 properties) was residential in nature. The single-family housing and multi-family complex developments account for the majority of growth. However, the most significant growth in terms of percentage change occurred in townhouses, which increased 77.1% in new square footage and acres developed, 85.9% in building square footage, and 82.3% in total assessed value. While the employment-generating growth totals are a small fraction of the residential change, they still represent a significant increase to the existing employment-generating land uses in North End. The District has the highest growth rates for both residential and employment-generating uses of all the districts.



In total, residential growth in the North End District accounts for 42.2% of total new residential structures built, 49.0% of the total new residential building square footage, 54.8% of the total acreage developed for residential uses, and 48.4% of the total new residential assessed value for all of Blacksburg. The data suggests that the North End District will continue to be a prominent location for new residential development.

5. South End District

The South End District had a high concentration of employment-generating development during the past decade, particularly in terms of industrial growth. The District captured the largest number of new employment-generating R&D developments, including 11 new industrial sites (primarily due to the Corporate Research Center). In total, over 750,000 SF of new R&D building space was added valuing nearly \$40.0 million in assessed value. Industrial uses account for 80.2% of the total square footage and 61.7% of the added assessed value. In contrast, the District only captured 10 new residential units. Three are single-family homes totaling 5,848 SF of building space. The others are condominium units. This total only accounts for a 5.0% increase in square footage despite the District's relatively small existing residential presence. The data indicate that the South End will continue to develop as an industrial, office and commercial center.

6. Northwest District

Northwest experienced moderate residential growth between 1990 and 1999. There were 77 new single-family houses constructed, adding 140,662 new square feet of building space and \$10.1 million in new building assessed value. This growth constitutes an 11.2% increase in residential housing properties and a 18.2% increase in residential building space. New housing lots averaged approximately 1 acre per unit, contrasting the 2.9 acres per unit for previously existing single-family housing. Only one new employment-generating property was developed in the District over the past ten years, adding 3,756 SF of commercial space. This new development is a small addition (1.6%) to the existing commercial building space despite being a 20% increase in number of developed parcels.

E. CONCLUSIONS

Each neighborhood district has a distinct development identity. As with many towns, Blacksburg has a highly developed commercial core surrounded by mid- to lower-density residential neighborhoods. Each district has a unique mix of land uses that has evolved from years of development. Despite this, there is a dichotomy between the districts east of the Route 460 By-pass and those west of the highway. Downtown and Midtown have traditionally functioned as the Town's employment centers, with higher density residential neighborhoods surrounding commercial development. South End is establishing itself as an emerging commercial area, driven by industrial, strip retail, and services, as well as, R&D

related activities at Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center. In contrast, Southwest, Northwest and the North End consist of more traditional suburban-style neighborhoods and rural countryside, with a predominance of open space, low-density residential development, and nodes of commercial development.

The land use disparity between districts is best reflected in the distribution of agricultural land. Downtown, Midtown and South End do not have any land currently used as agricultural. This is due to increased urbanization in the Town's core and the development pressures that lead to the conversion of this land into "higher and better" development uses. On the other hand, the Northwest, Southwest, and North End District contain hundreds of acres of agricultural and vacant land, and the Town has instituted development controls that will allow these areas to remain rural in character.

Local development trends over the past decade indicate that Blacksburg is a more desirable location for residential development. The Town's employment districts have experienced some growth, but at a much slower rate than the County. Although Blacksburg is an attractive location for both businesses and residences, and is first option for many developers, the higher cost of real estate and more demanding development approval process has caused some to look outside the Town for development opportunities. Coupled with a shift in regional shopping patterns to the Christiansburg/Route 460 corridor, Blacksburg is quickly becoming a secondary location for some businesses within the region. As a result, the Town has been capturing primarily higher-value residential development with limited success in capturing new employment-generating uses. With a few exceptions, there is little or no data to suggest that these trends will change within the foreseeable future.